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Case Studies in Collection and Technical Services -- Case Study Five: In Presentations, Demographics are Key

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Case Studies in Collection and Technical Services

Case Study Five: In Presentations, Demographics are Key.

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Ladd took a deep breath and then slowly exhaled. He had just gotten off the phone with the library director, who had called to ask him to be a presenter at the upcoming library board meeting. The board was a group of major library donors or probable donors who came to the library twice a year for an all day meeting, where the program was designed so that the board could learn more about a particular aspect of the inner workings of the library. As well they were given the opportunity to share their insights and ideas with library administration. The board members were passionate about the library, and often worked in fast-paced, high-stakes, high-pay jobs, or sometimes they were just independently wealthy. **Ladd** was very aware that these people came from a very different social milieu than his own. He also was aware of the honor of being asked by the director to be a part of the semi-annual board meeting. The director was a no-nonsense, direct person, and would not have asked if she did not think **Ladd** would do a fantastic job.

While the specifics of his presentation were up to **Ladd** (the director was a very hands-off administrator) he had been asked to talk about electronic book vendors. He knew it would have to be a very different type of presentation from the straight bibliographic instruction session he conducted quite often as a subject librarian. While he was comfortable wearing a teacher's hat, he wasn't as sure of himself as a presenter when the stakes were higher, and the audience completely different from the students who usually filled the seats in the library training room. He realized that more was at stake than just talking about electronic book vendors. The director would expect him to represent the library in an exemplary light, yet as well, help the board understand the financial concerns facing the library and it's need to supply electronic information as well as print. **Ladd** had a big job ahead of him. How to start?

The Experts Speak:

While the topic might be one where **Ladd** is an expert, the audience he will be speaking to is a completely new type of audience-beastie for him. As any good public speaker knows, being aware of and using the demographics of the audience when planning and preparing a talk is key to grabbing their attention, and helps the speaker best share the necessary information in a way that they will retain what the speaker wants them to.

Ladd will need to consider all sorts of factors in relation to the specific and special

demographics of the board members. For example, he will need to consider:

- Their social and economic backgrounds
- Their levels of education
- Their motivations in general
- And more specifically, their motivation for being a part of the library board
- Their ages
- Their relationship to the library and the university

As well **Ladd** will need to consider the non-demographic aspects when preparing his talk:

- The relationship of his topic to those of the rest of the program
- The desired outcomes of the meeting by the library administration
- Previous similar presentations, if any (he would not want to repeat something they had heard in the recent past)

Given all this, we present below an example of the answers to the previous considerations to show how to gather demographic and other information to improve library presentations.

First:

- Their social and economic background, and
- Their level of education

As mentioned above, most of the board members are wealthy, and quite possibly come from money. They are probably savvy technology users, and are up on, and interested in political and economic news. They are used to being in positions of power and having others make quick, concise informative presentations to them that lay out the big picture of an issue. This means that

Ladd will not need to give them a whole lot of background information on the economics of digital information, but he may need to put the economic realities facing libraries today into context with the budgetary realities. As well, he will want to focus on the economic and copyright issues related to eBooks and their place and use in an academic library — and not explain to them how to use the interface as he would normally do in a BI session. They will probably not be interested in using it, and if they were, they could most likely figure it out on their own, given their backgrounds, lifestyles, and education.

Second:

- Their motivations in general

These board members are probably motivated by economics, law, education/libraries, and since they are on a library board, they are most likely a bit altruistic. They see themselves as benefactors and advisors to the library and the library administrators. They want to know that they can share their money and their expertise. So **Ladd** will need to make sure they understand digital books in a way that can cull their expertise and interests out of them. He will need to cover briefly — What are the business aspects of digital publishing in relationship to libraries? What are the economic aspects of digital publishing in relationship to libraries? What are the legal issues (i.e., copyright) of digital publishing in relationship to libraries? What are the social aspects of digital publishing and information, again in relationship to libraries.

Third:

- And more specifically their motivation for being a part of the library board

Most likely these board members are alumni, and/or parents of students (past/present/future). Given that, **Ladd** will need to talk about how a student will interact with a digital book in the course of their time as a student here. What are the opportunities (i.e., access to texts from their rooms)? How will the students find these (i.e., will they be listed in the catalog)?

Fourth:

- Their ages

While the board members did not grow up with technology, given their educational backgrounds and social status as mentioned above, they will most likely be very savvy with technology.

And fifth:

- Their relationship to the library and the university

See the bullet above for their motivation for being on the library board.

We won't be covering the other considerations (non-demographic) listed above, as the answers will be easy to find out by asking the planning committee (or person in charge as the case may be!).

Now that **Ladd** has a better picture of who will be in his audience, he can begin planning his presentation so that he will engage the board members in the topic, and enlist their thoughts and ideas on solutions to the issues related to digital books in academic libraries. Perhaps he will excite a board member so much, they will become a library donor who gives funds for an eBook collection. Since **Ladd** has made sure his talk fits the audience, he will impress the heck out of his library director. And we can only guess what happens after that. 🐾

